

*The Amber Whale—A Harpooneer's Story.*

By J. BOYLE O'REILLY.

Whalemen have a strange belief as to the formation of whales, and they say that a portion of some small part of the whale, and the skin of some whales which have been cast in the sea, become transformed into the bodies which were almost entirely transformed into the present substance.

We were down in the Indian Ocean, after sperm, and the last hours out;

The last six months in the tropics, and looking out for a sperm;

Five men up on the royal yards, weary of straining their eight;

Another day like its brother—just morning, and noon, and night—

Nothing to break the sameness; water, and wind, and sun;

Melancholy, gentle, and blighting—never a change in one—Every day like its brother; when the noonday eight, held came,

Twas like the yesterday, and we seemed to know that to-morrow would be the same;

The forecast hands had a lay time; there wasn't a thing to do;

The ship was painted, tarred down, and scraped, and the mate was sick;

We'd worked at sunset and sunrise till there wasn't a yard to use;

And all could do was watch and pray for a sperm whale's sport or news;

It was the luck of the wildest sort, and though many a whale;

Spent his watch below on the look-out, never a whale came near;

At least of the kind we wanted; there were lots of whales of all sorts, and sharks, and such like; as if they enjoyed the sport;

Of seeing a whaleship idle; but we never lowered a harpoon;

For less than a blackfish; there's no oil in a killer's or finback's coat;

There was rich reward for the look-out men—tebaco for every sailor;

And a barrel of oil for the lucky dog who'd be first to "raise" a whale;

The crew was a mixture from every land, and many a tongue they spoke;

And when they sat in the fo'castle, enjoying an evening smoke,

There were tales told, youngsters, would make you stare: stories of countries about the Pacific and right-whales away at the Poles.

There was one of these fantastic yarns that we always loved to hear—

Kamtschatka, and Nauroi, and Yankee, and all would lend an ear;

To that strange old tale that was always new—the wonderful treasure-tale;

Or old Davy, Eastern harpooneer who had struck an Aztec temple;

Ay, that was a tale worth hearing, lad; if 'twas true we could n't say;

Or if 'twas a year old Mat had spun to wile the time away;

It's fifteen years ago, said Mat, since I shipped as harpooneer;

On board a bark in New Bedford, and came cursing somewhere near;

To this whaling-ground where we're cruising now; but when we were plenty then;

And when we had when we scarce get oil to pay for the ship and men;

There were none of these oil wells running then; at least, what shore talk term;

Oil wells in Pennsylvania; but sulphur-bettoms and sperm were plenty as frogs in a pond-hole, and all of 'em big whales, too—

One hundred barrels for sperm-whales, and for sulphur-bettoms for whales;

You couldn't pick out a small one—the littlest calf or cow;

Had more oil in 'em than the big bell whales we used to think of now;

We were more to the east, off Java Straits, a little below the mouth—

A hundred and five to the eastard, and nine degrees;

And that was as good a whaling ground for middling-sized heady whales as any in the ocean; and 'twas always white with sail;

From Scotland, and Hull, and New-England—for the whales were thick as frogs;

And 'twas little trouble to kill 'em then, for they lay as quiet as mice;

And if we had go visiting the other whale-ships round;

Or p'pos' we'd strike on a Dutchman, calmed off the coast;

Or some old Dutch, or Batavia, with plenty of schippins to sell for a few whale's teeth or a gallon of oil, and the latest news to tell;

And in every ship that whaling fleet there was just like a school of fish;

Like an Amber Whale had been seen that year that was worth a ton of gold;

And one man, mate of a Scotchman, said he'd seen, awfully;

A big whale of sperm, and one whale's spout was twice as high as the rest;

And we knew that that was the Amber Whale, for we'd seen it before;

That she spout was twice as high as the rest, and a hundred feet or more;

And often, when the look-out man cried "He blows!" the whale was a school of fish;

Thrilled every heart with the greed of gold, for we thought of the Amber Whale;

But never a sight of my spout we saw, till the season there went round;

And the ships ran down to the southward to another whaling-ground;

We sailed to the last off Java, and then we ran to the west;

To get our recruits at Mauritius, and give the crew a rest;

Five days we ran in the trade winds, and the boys were beginning to take; but the Amherst, and nine degrees;

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